

VZCZCXRO0083
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #2737/01 2510728
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 080728Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1376
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002737

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

SCA PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: WORSENING SECURITY IN BADGHIS

Reference: KABUL 02599

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Inadequate ISAF and Afghan forces and ill-advised pre-election moves by the Karzai government are contributing to worsening security conditions in Badghis Province. Without more forces capable of holding ground (NATO-ISAF or Afghan) and more progress on delivering essential government services, insurgent attacks are likely to grow, and the provincial government will find itself confined to an ever smaller security enclave. A province that should be in the win column will be in danger of falling under effective insurgent control. Ambassador Eikenberry visited the provincial capital of Qala-e-Naw on August 27 for meetings with the governor and other local officials, as well as with ISAF and PRT personnel. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Badghis's problems are fueled by several pre-election moves by the Karzai government aimed at shoring up votes but which appear to have made conditions worse. In June, 15 prisoners arrested in May as part of an anti-corruption investigation were released by local authorities, after the intervention of officials reportedly close to the president. The investigation implicated former Governor Mohammad Ashref Naseri (current governor in Zabul Province). The probe found evidence Naseri submitted fraudulent expense invoices and pocketed the money. His son and line Minister of Finance Mohammad Shah Shafiq were also implicated. None of these three individuals were among those arrested. Shafiq belongs to the Nahebdzadah clan, the most powerful family in Badghis. Release of the prisoners after a professional investigation by the Attorney General's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), working with NDS, had been seen locally as evidence that corrupt officials can operate with impunity. Naseri has ignored continued efforts by ACU to question him about the case.

¶3. (SBU) In July, Jalani Popal, head of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), orchestrated a truce between local elders and Taliban in the northern district of Bala Murghab. (REF A) The agreement came just weeks after an RC-West operation had established four new checkpoints in the Pashtun-dominated district. Popal's agreement, which reportedly came with a monetary payment, called on the Taliban to permit elections to occur in the district and to support development projects and construction of the long-stalled Ring Road through Badghis, the only province where the road is unfinished.

¶4. (SBU) The day after Popal's meeting, ANA forces withdrew from the four checkpoints. ANA 207th Corps Commander Jalandar Shah says the Ministry of Defense ordered him to pull back, though he acknowledged that the truce only required withdrawal from civil-occupied homes, not from the checkpoints. The Taliban did not uphold their end of the deal. Only eight of thirty-three polling centers in Bala Murghab opened Election Day, and ballot box stuffing benefiting Karzai is suspected in all of the centers.

¶5. (SBU) The result was a short-term gain for Karzai, but a probable weakening of the Afghan government's real and potential support. The Badghis insurgency has emerged with greater freedom of movement and is continuing to press attacks into the neighboring districts of Qadis and Muqur. In the largely-Tajik district of Jawand, local

militias reportedly are forming to protect residents against the insurgency. Construction on the Ring Road remains stalled.

¶16. (SBU) ISAF and ANSF in Badghis are inadequate. Though the ANP is well-led, it is undermanned at 1,300 policemen, against an insurgency now estimated at over 2000. The ANA has two battalions assigned to Baghdis, but they are poorly trained and equipped and play a minimal role. As for ISAF, a 220-soldier Spanish contingent lacks a maneuver component and limits its operations to escorting aid workers and guarding the FOB/PRT and airport in Qala-e-Naw. Spanish officers admit that insurgent activity is increasing and that major roads to Ghormach and Herat are no longer secure, even during the day, an observation confirmed by local leaders at a meeting with Ambassador Eikenberry. They do not move outside Qala-e-Naw at night. Their four-month rotations severely hamper their effectiveness.

¶17. (SBU) A 120-soldier Italian contingent at a Forward operating Base in Bala Murghab, along with a 20-person US Police Mentoring/Embedded Training Team, conducts patrols and is more effective. An RC-West plan to pull the Italians out of Bala Murghab and replace them with Spanish forces is being reconsidered and a post-election clearing operation is under consideration. Even so, ISAF's ability at current force levels to hold areas it has cleared is problematic, especially now that ANSF have pulled back from forward positions. A company of the 82nd Airborne Division is due to arrive in Badghis in mid-September to serve as police trainers. This will help with security. But the relatively small numbers will limit the gains.

¶18. (SBU) Badghis can be turned around, but it will take more attention and resources from ISAF, then international community, and

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from the Afghan government. Governor Delbar Jan Arman replaced the corrupt former governor in March and has sought to improve governance. The hard-working ANP police chief, General Sami, is also a welcome addition. During Ambassador Eikenberry's visit, Arman focused on the need for security, water, electricity and completion of the Ring Road. (REF A) He also appealed for more police and more ISAF operations aimed at retaking ground from the insurgents, a stance that has strained his relations with the Spanish PRT. A majority of the line ministers and local officials are possibly engaged in corruption. If Arman takes on corrupt officials, he risks driving more powerful families into the arms of the insurgency. He knows he has little support in Kabul.

¶19. (SBU) WAY AHEAD: We will work with NATO-ISAF and through IDLG and the Office of the Attorney General to lobby the Afghan government to replace Ghaws Muhammad, the chief prosecutor in Baghdis. Governor Arman has asked the Attorney General to have him replaced without success. Local NDS officials have a dossier of evidence against Muhammad and other prosecutors. Removing him would strengthen Arman and signal Kabul is interested in good governance, the opposite signal it sent by ordering the dismissal of the corruption case in June.

¶10. (SBU) We will work with our Spanish allies and its PRT to determine if there are governmental or economic developmental projects that might help make short-term contributions to reverse the negative security trends.

¶11. (SBU) We will also work with NATO-ISAF, the Asian Development Bank, and the Afghan government to explore ways to push forward the long-stalled Ring Road project through Badghis Province.

EIKENBERRY